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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that it is necessary for English departments to move in several nontraditional directions to establish curricula and internships for women interested in nonacademic professions such as business, industry, and government. Three suggestions are given to English teachers: help students develop skills, such as perceptive reading and critical writing, which are "marketable"; become as concerned and informed about sex discrimination in nonacademic professions as in academic professions; demand more of all students in composition and writing; and develop a curriculum which will leave students prepared for nonteaching careers and instill in students a love of language and literature because of their intrinsic worth. (TS)

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THE ENGLISH TEACHER AS CAREER COUNSELOR

By Jerold J. Savory

This paper was given as part of a panel on "Women and the Profession" during the Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (St. Louis, March 13-15, 1975). The author is Associate Professor of English and Head of the English Department in Columbia College, Columbia, South Carolina.

Can a liberal arts degree in English "liberate" women for non-teaching professions? Until fairly recently, this has not been an especially pressing question. For well over a century, for example, students at Columbia College (a South Carolina woman's college, founded in 1854) have, like students in most colleges and universities, asssumed that a major in English would lead primarily to a teaching career. Times have changed, especially for the woman's college. Rapidly changing career aspirations, coupled with slowly changing career opportunities for women, bring into focus an increasingly clear need for English departments to re-evaluate their goals and to re-direct their programs.

Therefore, my point is this: While discrimination against women is doubtless still a problem in higher education, another even more pressing problem seems to have eclipsed it. Uncertain job markets for English teachers, male or female, have led many career-minded students rightly to consider non-academic professions. Whether or not English will remain a valid and attractive liberal arts major

for women will depend upon the willingness of English departments to move in several non-traditional directions to establish curricula and internships for women interested in business, industry, and government. Most of us, I presume, are neither well-prepared nor especially inclined to make such moves. But, like it or not, our first step as English teachers will have to be toward becoming informed and informing career counselors to an increasing number of students who themselves are forcing us to raise the question: Why an English major for a woman who does not plan to teach or administer in academia?

I am sure that I need not add extensively to the burden of statistics and quotations heaped upon us in recent years by our journals and the academic news media. Therefore, I propose to spend less time on diagnosis of the problem than on some suggestions, however modest, for beginning a solution.

A January, 1975, issue of The Chronicle of Higher Ecucation printed in its "Fact-File" a summary of findings from a survey of nearly 200,000 college freshmen. Among some 50 different categories was one headed "Probable major field of study." Out of some 15 choices, the highest by far, at nearly 18%, was "Business." The lowest, at scarcely above 1%, was "English." Such a finding is, of course, not especially surprising. After all, the same survey showed "Business" at the head of "Specified probable careers," topped only by "Other" and "Undecided."[1] What I find interesting about these statistics is what they suggest when viewed alongside other kinds of findings

published recently suggesting English as an excellent undergraduate major for students who plan to enter business and other non-academic careers. Linwood Orange, for example, in his widely-distributed Modern Language Association monograph, "English: The Pre-Professional Major," has gathered ample facts, figures, and comments from nearly 100 law and medical schools, as well as from over 400 industrial organizations in 21 states -- all of which, in his words, provide "documentary evidence that training in English and literature, particularly at the college level, far from being a waste of time, is invaluable in preparation for futures in three outstanding professional areas: law, medicine, and business."[2]

Since the 1972 publication of Professor Orange's findings, numerous other articles have been written and conferences held which confirm and expand his point.[3] For example, every regional or national gathering of English department heads that I have attended over the past three years has included at least one seminar on the preparation and placement of non-teaching majors. Like the weather, the topic seems to stimulate much discussion. It is likely that something needs to be done to change the academic climate, but we are unclear about what and even less clear about how.

Since the theme of this convention is "Let the Minds of Our Students Be the Supreme Resource," let me turn for a moment to the minds of two students whose frustrations and ideas were aired in a

recent AAUP Bulletin. Elizabeth Friskey, in an article "College Women and Careers," says that she was intrigued when she read about Dr. Matina Horner's study of Radcliffe women, a study which concluded that intelligent undergraduate women tend to lose their career aspirations as they go through college. Ms. Friskey, who received her B.A. from Princeton in June, 1974, suggests that this is less the fault of students than it is of inadequate to non-existent career-counseling programs. Because I believe that her case is typical of students in many, if not most, colleges and universities, let me quote a portion of her narration:

> I remember feeling stranded as an underclass woman when I chose my courses each semester. . . Since I had no idea of my career plans, I did not know whom to ask for advice. I decided to major in English since it seemed like a sufficiently general field to allow me to keep various options open until I had developed some reason for choosing a specific career. . . . When I signed into the English department I had to submit a tentative schedule of courses for the next two years, which was the first long-range planning that had been required of me. When I met with the representative he asked what I planned to do after graduation so that the department could keep a record of my plans. . . . Feeling obliged to show signs of academic purpose, I ventured that I was interested in graduate school, the only plan I could think of that demanded specifically an English degree. What a perfect opportunity that would have been for him to suggest a few other options I might consider and help me plan some other courses to take -- if only he in turn had informed himself of career opportunities in his field other than teaching and research.[4]

A second student, this time a graduate student, offers in the same journal an article on "Nonacademic Job Hunting" which, after

a description of the frustration of trying to "sell" a graduate English degree to businessmen, concludes that the task is really a matter of learning certain communications skills, something that the English teacher, of all persons, ought to know about. The writer concludes:

> If one considers that the most conspicuous alternatives to college teaching for many doctoral students and nontenured faculty members are unemployment and despair, the necessity of nonacademic job hunting becomes more apparent. I see no reasonable choice but to become skillful at this kind of job hunting.[5]

Enough, then, for the statistics and quotations. As an English teacher, I also see "no reasonable choice." English language and literature remains an excellent liberal arts major for the student with non-teaching aspirations; but before we can persuade our students, we will have to persuade ourselves. So, at the risk of oversimplifying a process that experience is showing me to be slow, demanding, and often trying, I will conclude with a few suggestions which have grown out of an Alterantive Careers in English program in the college where I teach.

First, <u>we must learn how to become less parochial as English teachers</u>. Professor Orange is correct in saying that teaching is not the only career possibility for the English major, but a confirming survey of attitudes of business, industrial, and governmental employers is merely a first step. The next must be ours, because most such employers are unaccustomed to turning to English departments to fill their ranks. And since the business leader's preconception of the

English teacher is probably no less faulty than the English teacher's idea of the typical business executive, we have a communications task on our hands. Skills in perceptive reading and critical-creative writing are "marketable," but we must prove it by producing students with skills in writing public relations materials, grant proposals, and other forms of technical report, journalistic, and mass media productions. In addition to dialogue with business and governmental employers, we must explore prospects for interdisciplinary courses in such seemingly unlikely combinations as "English and Political Economics," "English and Physical Science," and "English and Business Administration." Parochialism is a luxury we cannot afford.

This brings me to me second and third suggestions which can be stated briefly. The second is that we must become as concerned and informed about sex discrimination in non-academic professions as we now are about the problem in our own profession. For our women students, this means that along with regular courses in English we must offer "consciousness-raising" seminars to encourage women to set higher vocational goals, to inspire realistic self-confidence in seeking administrative positions, and to develop a spirit of informed competition for jobs normally dominated by men. And the third is that, contrary to opinions that may state otherwise, we must demand more writing from our students -- from Freshman Composition to Senior Seminar. An ability to write well is always an asset, but it is imperative for career opportunities for the English major who does

not plan to teach.

And if you think that this sounds like the closing scene from "The Man of La Mancha," my fourth suggestion will confirm my insanity! We must develop English curricula which will neither leave our students unprepared for non-teaching careers nor compromise our values in the study of language and literature for its own intrinsic worth. This can be done, but it will have to be done by teachers who are able to combine a love of great literature with a willingness to experiment with writing programs designed to show how language and ideas can be used creatively to reach a wide variety of audiences. The only impossibility of this dream will be our own reluctance to admit the worth of dreaming it and to face the risks of following it.

This brings me, like Joseph Campbell's "hero with a thousand faces," back from my descent into "hell" to return to my point of departure with a fifth suggestion, tempered now by the journey of the dark night of the English teacher's soul. Like it or not, we are going to have to become informed and informing career counselors.

Note: As a final illustration, I used a sound filmstrip entitled "The B.I.G. Idea," written and produced by two students at Columbia College as part of a workshop in "Writing for Public Relations" and as an example of the program for the non-teaching English major we have developed at the college. Much of the information in the filmstrip appears also in my article "The 'B.I.G.' Idea: Columbia College" in

ADE Bulletin (Number 44, February 1975), a copy of which I have attached to this paper.

NOTES

[1]"Fact-File: This Year's College Freshmen," The Chronicle of Higher Education (January 20, 1975), p 8.

[2]Linwood E. Orange, "English: The Pre-Professional Major," The Modern Language Association, 1972.

[3]ADE Bulletin, for example, has carried several articles on the subject during the past two years. These have included additional articles by Professor Orange.

[4]Elizabeth A. Friskey, "College Women and Careers," AAUP Bulletin, Vol. 60, No. 3 (September, 1974), pp 317-19.

[5]John T. Harwood, "Nonacademic Job Hunting," AAUP Bulletin, Vol. 60, No. 3 (September, 1974), pp 313-16.

From ADE Bulletin, No. 44 (February 1975), p 34.

THE "B.I.G." IDEA: COLUMBIA COLLEGE

English majors at Columbia College, South Carolina, may now prepare for a variety of careers. This liberal arts college for women has had and continues to have a strong teacher-training curriculum, and a large number of English majors still plan to certify to teach. A growing number, however, are asking, "What can I do with a degree in English if I do not wish to teach?" The English department now has an answer: the "B.I.G." (Business, Industry, and Government) English major.

Like all students at the college, the B.I.G. major takes a variety of basic liberal arts courses during her first two years. Like all English majors, she also is required to do work in literature and language, research and criticism. However, unlike the English education major who must elect certain teacher-certification courses, the B.I.G. major elects course work from several academic disciplines which will help her combine her knowledge of literature and skills in writing with other knowledge and skills needed for careers in business, industry, and government.

For example, a student interested in public relations work in business or industry will take such courses as Writing for Public Relations, Technical and Scientific Report Writing, and Basic Journalism, all of which are offered by the English department, in addition to the regular English language and literature courses. She will then elect such courses as Advertising, Marketing, Retailing, and Business Law from the department of business and economics, one or two basic design courses from the art department, and other work from other academic disciplines, according to her interests and vocational goals.

Another student interested in a career in government or in preparing for law school will be guided into electives in history, political science, social psychology, and philosophy. Since many careers in public administration, government, and law require an ability to think, speak, and write clearly and logically, the English department now offers a number of writing courses and requires a substantial amount of written and oral work in all language and literature courses. A writing lab is available for additional work in developing competencies in writing, and it is open to all students at all academic levels.

A third example may be a student interested in a career in some form of media writing. Her electives will include a course in television from the speech-drama department, several creative writing and journalism courses, and a practicum designed to provide experience in a newspaper, publishing house, or television studio.

As the B.I.G. program progresses, we are finding that we must develop in three key areas: a practicum and internship program, an expanded writing program, and a program of interdisciplinary courses. One successful course in report writing is elected by students who may receive credits either in business or in English. Another in public relations writing involves a member of the English faculty working with faculty members from the art department and the business department. Another popular course in "Western Cultural Heritage" is taught by representatives from five departments and is designed to help students identify relationships between ideas and styles in art, music, philosophy, and literature from the ancient through the modern periods. Such a course, we believe, is important for a career in writing in any field where an ability to deal imaginatively with ideas and concepts is demanded. We are planning for such future interdisciplinary courses as Cultural and Economic American History, Educational Media Writing, Proposal Writing, and Imagineering, a course exploring the relationship of fantasy and the recreational industry (e.g., Disneyworld). In developing such interdisciplinary courses, we are trying to create educational experiences that will help students to see the "usefulness" of English and other arts and humanities in careers in business, industry, and government.

Finally, the B.I.G. program seeks to provide field trip and internship experiences, as well as co-curricular activities, designed to give students practical experience comparable to the student-teaching program for those who plan to teach English. Several internships, especially in government and the news media, have already been established. As preparation for establishing others in business and industry, the English Department is sponsoring an on-going evening seminar program involving faculty, students, and community business and industrial leaders meeting to discuss aspects of the theme, "The Humanities and the Business World: Emerging Careers for Women." Additionally, B.I.G. majors are encouraged to participate in other co-curricular activities such as campus publications and student government and arts groups. We have found that employers are often as interested in a student's record of extracurricular leadership as they are in an academic transcript.

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